

Oregon News

POLITICS

Contractors sue Oregon Gov. Tina Kotek over executive order requiring union labor

OPB | By Dirk Vanderhardt

Last week, a coalition of contractor associations and more than a dozen individual construction firms sued Kotek in Marion County Circuit Court, arguing she has overstepped her authority.

They're seeking a freeze on the directive while they make the case that Kotek cannot make the changes she seeks without legislative authority or necessary rulemaking by state agencies.

Oregon Gov. Kotek talks homelessness, education, federal funding and more at roundtable

KATU

She then went on to talk about Multnomah County's [recent ask for millions of dollars from the state and Metro to address a \\$104 million homeless services gap](#). She said she wants to see specifics on what the county is doing within their budget to prioritize homeless services.

The governor said she looked at potentially changing the spending for students with disabilities in her budget recommendations but was unable to move that cap in the budget.

Kotek told Giardinelli that instead of increasing funding per student, the state needs more accountability on how the money is spent. She says she plans to work on that.

Kotek mentioned the state's wildfire map and a recent pause on appeals. She wants to give time for the Legislature to take up the conversation, and that next week, Oregon can expect to hear from the wildfire funding group and committee about their own report and the different ways the state can consider having ongoing sustainable funding for wildfire suppression and helping communities become more resilient.

Oregon's official steak? T-bone could become state symbol

Statesman Journal | By Dianne Lugo

[Senate Concurrent Resolution 13](#), introduced by **Sen. Todd Nash, R-Enterprise**, and Rep. Bobby Levy, R-Echo, would designate the cut of beef as Oregon's latest state symbol. Lawmakers made [potatoes the official state vegetable](#) in 2023 and the 2011 Legislature designated Jory soil the official state soil. Other state symbols include the Dungeness Crab, pear, hazelnut and Oregon grape.

The [Oregon Cattlemen's Association](#) and [Oregon Cattlewomen](#) unanimously voted in support of the legislation, according to Diana Wirth, president-elect of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association.

SCR 13 now heads for a full vote in the Senate and, if approved, to the House of Representatives.

New Bill Would Allow Grocery Stores to Sell Cocktails in a Can

Willamette Week | By Nigel Jaquiss

[House Bill 3730](#), sponsored by state Rep. Rob Nosse (D-Portland) at the request of the Northwest Grocery Retail Association, comes with a sweetener. The grocers are proposing a high rate of taxation: \$8 a gallon, which is more than twice the tax rate in California.

Nosse emphasized that benefit in a statement on the bill. "Allowing grocery stores to sell ready-to-drink cocktails gives our homegrown businesses greater market access, expanding consumer choice and generating new tax revenue that will directly fund youth alcohol and drug addiction prevention and treatment programs," he said.

The Recreation Industry and Trial Lawyers Battle Over Liability Waivers

Willamette Week | By Nigel Jaquiss

Few bills this session will be more heavily fraught than House Bill 3140, which would allow all recreational businesses to require customers to "release the operator from any claim for ordinary negligence." In other words, to sign a liability waiver.

Despite its opacity, the bill thrusts into public view a battle raging between one of Oregon's economic backbones—the recreation industry—and the Oregon Trial Lawyers Association, long one of Salem's most potent political forces.

Representatives from the recreation industry—which state figures show generated more than \$16 billion in spending in 2022—say “nuclear” jury verdicts have caused insurance costs to soar, threatening the survival of the mostly small businesses that connect Oregonians to the pastimes they love. But a leading Portland trial lawyer says forcing consumers to waive their rights to sue for ordinary negligence is fundamentally unfair. “Passage of HB 3140 would strip protections from consumers,” David Sugerman says.

[Rural Truckers Are Paying Too Much and Urban Car Owners Are Paying Too Little](#)

Willamette Week | By Nigel Jaquiss

Oregon’s method of allocating costs turns on the principle that road users should pay based on use. If the payments are out of balance, the Oregon Constitution requires lawmakers to fix them. “The Legislative Assembly shall provide for a biennial review and, if necessary, adjustment of revenue sources to ensure fairness and proportionality,” the constitution says.

State Sen. Mike McLane (R-Powell Butte), a member of the Finance Committee, says it’s past time lawmakers did their duty to balance who pays and who benefits. “It’s a very serious issue,” McLane says. “I’m a little shocked we are not addressing it because we have a constitutional duty to do so.” (Senate President Rob Wagner, D-Lake Oswego, hopes to correct the imbalance as part of the transportation package.)

Because lawmakers have failed to adjust the revenue formula, the Oregon Trucking Association last year sued legislative leaders and Gov. Tina Kotek for their failure to follow the constitutional requirement to balance responsibility for road costs. Truckers say that failure has cost Oregon trucking companies, many of them small, family-owned businesses in rural parts of the state, more than \$500 million.

[Owner of Fairview-based trucking company gets probation for disabling pollution controls](#)

Oregonian Live | By Maxine Bernstein

The owner of a Fairview-based trucking company was sentenced Tuesday to three years of probation for disabling pollution controls on at least 13 of his diesel semi-trailer trucks.

Between 2019 and 2023, he tampered with the emissions control equipment on the trucks that increased the release of lead, mercury, nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide and other pollutants in violation of the Clean Air Act, which limits the amount of pollution diesel trucks can emit, according to Assistant U.S. Attorney Andrew Ho.

Ungar, Clancy’s lawyer, argued that his client deleted the emission controls on the trucks to keep his company “solvent and operational, not to generate profits.”

[Effort to expand free school meals gains momentum in Oregon](#)

The Register-Guard | By Miranda Cyr

Oregon could become the 10th state in the U.S. to offer universal free meals for students under a bill making its way through the Legislature.

[House Bill 3435](#) would make school meals available to all students at no cost, regardless of their household income. If passed, the law would require all school districts to offer free lunch and breakfast starting in the 2026-27 school year. It would also direct the Department of Education to apply for statewide participation in federal programs and projects that expand access to free or reduced-price meals.

Neron said the bill also would leverage \$4 million in state funding to help the program operate more effectively.

"When they have the freedom to eat, students end up eating when perhaps they wouldn't have," Cuadros said. "They don't have to think about it. There's no fear that they're creating debt that perhaps their families can't afford. It just becomes a really happy opportunity as a part of their school day. We like it because we know that they're getting back to class with food in their bellies so they can think."

[County details where homeless services cuts may happen](#)

KATU | By Christina Giardinelli

The vast majority of the deficit, \$80 million, is the result of one time boosts in spending that came from excess metro tax revenue in 2023 and 2024.

Field noted the one-time revenue had been used for temporary programs, like day shelter boosts or employment programs at Central City Concern.

[High schooler in Hillsboro crafts legislation to prevent high school vaping](#)

Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Mike McNally

The 15-year-old sophomore is the driving force behind [Senate Bill 544](#), a one-page proposal that would require high schools with more than 1,500 students to install vaping-detection devices in bathrooms and common areas. He persuaded Sen. Janeen Sollman, D-Hillsboro, to sponsor the bill and is lobbying other lawmakers for their support.

In 2019, for example, the Oregon Health Authority estimated that one in four 11th graders in the state was using a vaping product. Youth use of e-cigarettes grew 80% between 2017 and 2019, the health authority said.

Vaping, just like smoking regular cigarettes, isn't allowed in schools or other public buildings. But the vapor from the e-cigarettes can be hard to detect without specialized equipment, so students are able to use the devices in restrooms and other areas without much fear of being caught.

[Senators call for ICE to respect tribal sovereignty amid immigration enforcement](#)

Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Shondiin Silversmith

In the weeks following President Donald Trump's crackdown on immigrants who lack legal residency, several tribal nations have expressed their concerns about their citizens being stopped and questioned by Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents.

[Oregon lawmaker tries again to ban the use of plastic trash bags used as luggage for kids in foster care](#)

OPB | By Lauren Dake

Kids placed in the Oregon child welfare system often experience [well-documented trauma in a complicated system](#). The idea to give them a piece of luggage so they didn't have to throw their belongings in a trash bag as they moved from placement to placement seemed like a small but meaningful -- and presumably -- easy fix.

That's what Sen. Janeen Sollman, D-Hillsboro, thought too when she first introduced [Senate Bill 548](#) during the 2023 legislative session to eradicate the practice and provide a duffel bag for each of the 4,500-plus children placed in state care.

The latest measure, [Senate Bill 1016](#), makes the language more explicit: it prohibits the use of garbage bags all together, no exceptions. The new law, if passed, would also require the Department of Human Services to give regular reports on the matter to state lawmakers.

CRIME & PUBLIC SAFETY

[State of Oregon to pay \\$4M to settle youth suicide lawsuit](#)

Statesman Journal | By Isabel Funk

The state of Oregon will pay a family \$4 million to settle a federal wrongful death lawsuit after their 20-year-old son died by suicide less than 24 hours after being released from MacLaren Youth Correctional Facility.

Dyllan Nanoski's family said the state, Oregon Youth Authority and its employees caused his death through negligence.

"The family hopes that this significant settlement will send a message to politicians and bureaucrats that they must take actions to dramatically improve the training for staff to address the needs of the acutely mentally ill and the available services it provides to the acutely mentally ill who are on probation, parole, or incarcerated," Ross said in a statement to the Statesman Journal.

[Clatsop County victim's family stunned at release of murderer, rapist](#)

KOIN | By Todd Unger

An Oregon man who murdered and raped one woman, and then sexually assaulted another, is now out on parole.

Nulph, now 73, was released from prison in the mid-1980s, but only a few months later sexually assaulted a Portland woman at gunpoint. She escaped and survived.

FEDERAL FUNDING FREEZE

[Billions of dollars at stake for farmers hit by Trump funding freeze, pause on foreign aid](#)

Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Allison Winter

In his first month in office, President Donald Trump has issued a flurry of executive orders to pause or cancel federal funding on a range of programs and grants — some of which go directly to farmers. Even though the administration said it would not stop payments to individuals and [courts have ordered the administration to resume](#) the programs, many farmers are awaiting payments on their contracts and have not been told when or if they can expect to receive expected funding. Billions of dollars are at stake.

“We continue to hear from family farmers and ranchers about the federal funding freeze, which has created significant uncertainty,” said Rob Larew, president of the National Farmers Union, an advocacy group that represents 220,000 farmers and ranchers in 33 states. “The interruption in funding raises concerns about whether USDA will disburse already obligated funds to farmers who have existing agreements with the department.”

The abrupt pause for USAID programs also interrupts agricultural research programs at 19 land-grant university-based innovation labs across 17 states — casting an uncertain future for those projects and the foreign grain markets they are attempting to cultivate.

[Federal hiring freeze, firings hindering Oregon endangered owl monitoring, protection](#)

Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Alex Baumhardt

Each spring, the U.S. Forest Service hires dozens of seasonal biologists to venture into remote Northwest forests on federal land and set up acoustic recorders to monitor for sounds indicating the presence of northern spotted owls, a threatened species.

There are only as many as 5,000 northern spotted owls left in the Northwest, with less than 2,000 estimated to be in Oregon, according to the Forest Service. The counting is crucial for preventing the owls’ extinction.

But President Donald Trump ordered a hiring freeze on Jan. 20

[Oregon agencies begin to grapple with Trump’s federal funding freeze](#)

OPB | By Lauren Dake

Agencies across Oregon are evaluating what the Trump administration’s decision to freeze federal grants means for local projects and programs. Many uncertainties remain, but the state’s Department of Transportation does have some clarity. Federal grants for programs like those mentioned above are no longer accepting applications. It remains uncertain if, or when, that might change.

“We lost the bridge in **Sen. (Suzanne) Weber’s** district. We lost the rock slide project in **Sen. (Daniel) Bonham’s**. Those evaporated. Grants are being withdrawn,” said Rep. David Gombert D-Otis, the co-chair of the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development. “I have two frustrations. These are necessary and important and in some cases, lifesaving projects, and the second is the agency puts time and taxpayer money into preparing the applications.”

For projects where the money has already been committed to a specific contract, also known as ‘obligated’ funds, the money remains usable. Most large transportation funding projects stretch over years and have several phases and funding streams. So, work is not coming to a screeching halt. But large chunks of money remain in limbo. For example, the Rose Quarter project, there is \$37.5 million obligated that remains unfrozen, but another \$413 million is on hold.

[Federal judge blocks Trump funding freeze, saying it produced a ‘nationwide crisis’](#)

Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Jennifer Shutt

A federal judge issued a preliminary injunction Tuesday blocking the Trump administration from implementing the type of sweeping freeze on grant and loan programs proposed in a memo the Office of Management and Budget released in late January.

Multnomah County Awards a Billion Dollars in Contracts Each Year Without Lobbying Rules

Willamette Week | By Anthony Effinger

In the past fiscal year, records show, the nonprofit shelter operator Do Good Multnomah received at least \$5.7 million in contracts from the Joint Office of Homeless Services, Multnomah County government's effort to aid and house people living outside.

What nobody knows is who, how and when Do Good Multnomah, a \$17 million-a-year organization, lobbied county officials to get the money.

That's because—unlike the state of Oregon, the city of Portland, and many large counties on the West Coast—Multnomah County doesn't require contractors or their lobbyists to register or report hours spent pitching their services to public officials.

Nonprofit Oregon hospitals spent less on charity care, community benefits in 2023

Oregon Live | By Kristine de Leon

Oregon hospitals and health systems reduced their spending on charity care for low-income patients, free health screenings, vaccine clinics and other "community benefit activities" in 2023, the first decline in nearly a decade.

Spending on charity care — free or discounted services for low-income patients — declined by 17.3% from its peak in 2020, despite a state law expanding eligibility in 2023. Hospitals spent approximately \$231 million on charity care in 2023.

The decline is in part because Medicaid temporarily boosted reimbursements to larger hospitals in 2023, reducing the need for subsidies and charity care for patients with little or no income. As a result, total community benefit spending dropped by \$139 million in 2023, the state reported.